



TRANSPORT AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Members present:

Mr SR King MP—Chair
Mr JR Martin MP
Mr LL Millar MP
Mr LA Walker MP

Staff present:

Ms D Jeffrey—Committee Secretary
Mr Z Dadic—Assistant Committee Secretary

PUBLIC BRIEFING—INQUIRY INTO THE SUMNERS ROAD INTERCHANGE UPGRADE PROJECT

TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

MONDAY, 28 MARCH 2022

Brisbane

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The committee met at 10.00 am.

CHAIR: Good morning. I declare this public briefing for the committee's inquiry into the Sumners Road Interchange Upgrade project open. My name is Shane King, the member for Kurwongbah and chair of the committee. I respectfully acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we meet today and pay our respects to elders past and present. We are very fortunate to live in a country with two of the oldest continuing cultures in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, whose lands, winds and waters we all share. With me here today are Lachlan Millar MP, the member for Gregory and deputy chair; Les Walker MP, the member for Mundingburra; and James Martin MP, the member for Stretton. The member for Toowoomba North and the member for Callide are apologies for this briefing.

This briefing is a proceeding of the Queensland parliament and is subject to the parliament's standing rules and orders. Only the committee and invited witnesses may participate in the proceedings. Witnesses are not required to give evidence under oath or affirmation, but I remind witnesses that intentionally misleading the committee is a serious offence. You have previously been provided with a copy of instructions for witnesses, so we will take those as having been read. I also remind members of the public that they may be excluded from the briefing at the discretion of the committee.

These proceedings are being recorded and broadcast live on the parliament's website. Media may be present and are subject to the committee's media rules and the chair's direction at all times. You may be filmed or photographed during the proceedings and images may also appear on the parliament's website or social media pages.

SCALES, Mr Neil, Director-General, Department of Transport and Main Roads

CHAIR: I welcome the Director-General of the Department of Transport and Main Roads, who has come along to brief us on this project. I invite you to make a short opening statement, after which we will have some questions for you.

Mr Scales: Good morning. Also in keeping with the spirit of reconciliation, I begin by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land and waterways where we meet today. I also want to pay my respects to elders past, present and emerging.

I want to thank the committee for the opportunity to present to you what we have done on the Sumners Road Interchange Upgrade. It is an \$80 million project fully funded by the Queensland government, so there is no federal money in this project. It is part of QTRIP, our four-year plan, and the current QTRIP is \$27½ billion.

The interchange upgrade was officially opened six months ahead of schedule, in March 2021, so it has been open about a year. It is located on the Centenary Motorway approximately two kilometres north of the Ipswich Motorway and about 1.3 kilometres south of the Dandenong Road interchange at Jamboree Heights in Brisbane. The interchange provides access to a large residential catchment in Middle Park, Mount Ommaney and Jamboree Heights to the west of the Centenary Motorway and a large residential and industrial catchment in Seventeen Mile Rocks and Darra to the east of the Centenary Motorway. It provides an access point to the Centenary Motorway itself as well as an east-west link across the motorway corridor. This link carries local and commercial traffic servicing the adjacent area. That includes B-double trips as well.

Just as a bit of background for the committee, before the project upgrade the existing features of the Sumners Road interchange were the two-lane bridge over the motorway with roundabouts at each end. Quite frankly, because of its configuration, which might have been okay when we built the thing a long time ago, it was operating beyond capacity due to high traffic volumes in the area, both on the interchange and on the adjoining entry and exit ramps to the motorway. It used to get a lot of cars backing back on to the highway at both points. We used to get a lot of delays from congestion on Sumners Road—a very regular occurrence in peak-hour traffic—and that also flowed on to Darra station, which is very close. If you were trying to get in there for a train, it could be very difficult.

The RACQ Red Spot Congestion Survey conducted in 2021 nominated the Centenary Motorway as the second most congested road in Queensland. We had a problem, so what did we do about it? The purpose of the project was to improve the functionality, safety, capacity and connectivity of the Sumners Road interchange with the Centenary Motorway as well as the local road network either side of the motorway. The upgrade resulted in benefits to road safety, freight efficiency—because you can get vehicles through the interchange a lot more easily—and reliability. The finished project also did very well for active transport in that we put a bikeway underneath the access road. There are about 85,000 vehicles in that area on the Centenary Motorway and 35,000 vehicles at the Sumners Road end, so it was very much needed.

The project began in September 2017, although there were planning studies in 2012 before that, and the original budget was \$65 million which was later revised to \$80 million during the design and development. We looked at three options which I can go into in more detail for the committee later. We did a lot of consultation on this one as well and, effectively, we put a new two-lane eastbound bridge and a four-lane westbound bridge and new signalised interchanges. We put in a U-turn for businesses and, as I said before, we separated out the cycle track because one of the earlier incarnations of this had cyclists interacting with vehicles. It is futureproofing to cater for any additional lanes on the Centenary Motorway and it improved a lot of tributary effect as well, so it was not just that single project; there were a lot of benefits to the local motorways as well.

After a lot of consultation, we named the Sumners Road bridge after Logan Indigenous war serviceman and resident Len Waters. He was born in 1924 and joined the Royal Australian Air Force at the age of 18. We were quite pleased about that and we put three plaques on the bridge as well, so there are three plaques venerating that. Before his passing in 1993, Mr Waters had spent many years working as a shearer and he raised his family in that area.

It was a 12-month construction that supported about 105 jobs and it delivers on all the strategic priorities that we have. The department's strapline is to provide a single integrated transport network that is accessible to everyone, so it fit the department's strategic purpose as well. That, in a nutshell, is it. I have given you three large-scale maps which are now with the committee, so you can have a good look at them if you need to.

CHAIR: Thank you. I must say that I do remember the roundabouts at each end. There is a substation at the end of the road that I used to go to a bit in my previous life. After visiting last week, I can see there is a vast improvement. You said you finished six months ahead of schedule.

Mr Scales: Yes.

CHAIR: What were the reasons for that—weather conditions or just efficiency?

Mr Scales: I think there was a lot in that. One is that we had done a lot of the geotech, so we knew what we were dealing with. The second thing was that we got really good consultation. Probably one of the more significant things is that, after a competitive process, the BMD team that was on that job did an exceptional job. If you think about Boundary Road going north—

CHAIR: I know it well.

Mr Scales:—it was the BMD team that delivered that. I think it was a combination of things: geotech, we had good access to materials, the designer did a good job as well and we were able to get the thing up and running. I also have to say that it was done under traffic—in other words, we did not stop the Centenary Motorway. We are getting a lot of practice now of doing works under traffic, particularly on the Bruce and on the M1. I think it was a combination of things.

CHAIR: I note that the road projects in my area are being done under traffic. Member for Gregory, do you have any questions at this stage?

Mr MILLAR: No, Mr Chair. I think I might leave it to you, given that you were the person who visited.

CHAIR: Yes, and I am happy for that. The initial project was at \$65 million but went up to \$80 million. We had some discussions on site about that last week—about the integrated cycle pathways and things that were put forward. I just wonder if you could expand on it, though.

Mr Scales: Yes. We took a lot of feedback. When we went out to the locals they said, 'We need a U-turn in here.' When you are designing something you need the local knowledge and they said they needed a U-turn, so we put that in. They also wanted a cycle underpass, so we took the cycling underneath. We also needed to sequence the interchanges because there is a Queensland ambulance station there, so there was a bit of that. Basically, we listened to the locals and added those things in, so the budget went from \$65 million to \$80 million and we came in at about that.

There was a lot of work done post the business case, which was 2018. Let me add as well that if members of the committee want to go out later on and have a look around with our magic map, we can organise that at some point.

Mr MARTIN: Neil, I have a question in relation to local suppliers. Could you share with us, other than BMD, who the other contracted local suppliers were in relation to the local industries policy?

Mr Scales: I think that might be in the submission, member for Stretton. We try to source as much as we can locally. The reason is that we like local jobs for local people for local solutions to local issues. We would have looked in that area for what we could do on concrete, on bitumen and so on. BMD as the major contractor, as a lot of contractors are, are required to source as much locally as they possibly can. Can I take that one on notice, Chair? I think it might actually be in the submission that we put in, but there will be detail on that, member for Stretton.

CHAIR: Thank you.

Mr WALKER: Director-General, the committee notes that the land resumptions and entry changes arose with the Centenary Ambulance Station as part of the project. Could you please outline what compromises and innovations occurred in respect of the ambulance station?

Mr Scales: We are fortunate that we have an organisation called Transmax that do all of our signalling in the state and they also do signalling outside of the state. Basically what happens is: if there is a shout—is it called a 'shout' here?—and an ambulance requires to come out it gets a green path. You can see it for ambulances and for fire engines in the whole of Brisbane. If they are approaching a light, they will get a green path. That is why if you see an ambulance a fire engine hurtling up beside you you can see the light sequences change. We give them priority, basically, and that could save somebody's life. We have a really good working relationship with the emergency services, so effectively they get priority. I am still trying to find something for the member for Stretton.

Mr WALKER: Director-General, is that done within the vehicle or by a traffic control network overseeing the movement of that vehicle?

Mr Scales: The vehicle has what we call selective vehicle detection, so it has a transponder in the vehicle and that will give you the green path. We have three control centres, I think, in Queensland. We have the one at Nerang, which we used to great effect four years ago for the Commonwealth Games; there is one in Townsville; and we have the BMTMC Brisbane traffic centre in the centre of Brisbane. It is selective vehicle detection, so there is a transponder in the vehicle, basically. That means that if it is out of hours or late at night you do not have somebody watching and having to manually trigger it.

CHAIR: Director-General, you have already mentioned some of the interactions with local businesses. At our site visit we noted that BMW has a big workshop there and you did works to incorporate them so that their business was not affected—the U-turns, as you mentioned, were all a part of that—and you liaised with Brisbane City Council as to where the boundaries were and how much work we did compared to them. I am just wondering if you could talk to that.

Mr Scales: On the local BMW dealership, we made sure that we minimised disruptions to them and talked to them a lot. We made sure they were always in the loop on what we were doing. The work that we did on the whole of the project was to make sure that it fit in with what our colleagues in BCC would expect on maintenance and also standards to make sure we were acting in concert. It was not just a project as an island; it was integrated into their tributary network.

CHAIR: I ask you to expand on the integrated cycle pathways. There was something that I had never seen before—it was the difference between the Brisbane City Council and the department of transport works—where the cyclists come could from the cycle path safely to a section of road with a high-speed cycle entry and exit, if that is the terminology for it. It was specifically angled so that the cyclists do not lose pace as they go through—I had never seen that before—and then in the Brisbane City Council section it was just the old gap in the guttering.

Mr Scales: Basically what we did was engage the local bicycle user group, the BUG, and took their advice just to make sure that we designed it to the latest possible standards regarding visibility and traction on the cycleway itself. We made sure that it fit the lycra-clad professional cyclists but that it also works for families and kids, and that is what it is designed for. Two out of three Queenslanders are described as overweight by my colleague John Wakefield and we are getting type 2 diabetes in kids now, so encouraging people to walk and cycle is something that the department and my minister are really hot on. We are doing as much of that as we possibly can. In fact, anything we build these days has a three-metre shared path next to it. The Moreton Bay Rail Link, which is now the Redcliffe Peninsula line, has a three-metre shared path next to it. The Gateway Upgrade North has a three-metre shared path next to it. It is tied into all of the local cycleways as well. We try to integrate

that with the local bicycle user groups. The user groups are pretty vociferous and pretty active and they know what they are doing. I have not been on a pushbike for, like, 40 years, so it is no good asking me.

CHAIR: I have been on the aforementioned peninsula rail path. Just on that, the bicycle user group was very complimentary on the interchange. They did have some questions that will take a lot of time to go through, but basically they were to do with the timing of the staged crossings. They were just wondering if there will be reviews and further interaction with them in terms of discussions to alter those times to help them out.

Mr Scales: It is one of the things that we always set and then we iterate around, so we will take feedback.

I have found some information for the member for Stretton. It is on page 29 of the submission. It was Aurecon, Arup, Centenary Landscaping Supplies, which is on the Centenary Motorway, Humes precast, Encore Girders and Downer, but the Centenary Landscaping Supplies I would probably know the best because that is where I get my gardening products. I should not really say that, but I have.

CHAIR: When we visited, some businesses told us about the consultation—there was a landscape supplier and some other businesses—and keeping access to them during the whole project and the U-turn facility so that people could always get in and out. We understood that there was a lot of feedback given and work done in concert with them during the project. They are all still in business, so it must have worked.

Mr Scales: I use Centenary Landscaping myself, but that was for the member for Stretton.

Mr MARTIN: There is no need for a question on notice, Chair.

CHAIR: Thanks. Finally, with regard to the noise fencing—and once again I am not disparaging Brisbane City Council—we noticed the difference in the noise fencing put up for this project and the original Brisbane City Council noise fencing. Is there any ongoing consultation about them upgrading that for those residents? They have had that noise fencing for a long time, so maybe it is sufficient. I ask you to expand on that.

Mr Scales: We have a pretty sophisticated system for noise monitoring and it is on our website. The noise is measured on a log scale, so three decibels is a doubling of power and six decibels is a quadrupling of power. We talk to the Brisbane City Council a lot on a lot of different things. I am not sure we are talking to them on this one particularly, Chair, so we have put the noise barriers where we considered it to be above 60 decibels. If it is above that, we put the noise barriers in. I am not really sure what our colleagues in BCC are doing in that area.

CHAIR: I think from memory from our visit that the department had overlapped and enhanced some the Brisbane City Council's noise fencing, just because of the project and because it was the right thing to do. It was interesting to see the marked difference between the two. That is all.

Mr Scales: We collaborate a lot with BCC. I meet Colin Jensen, my colleague CEO, on a very regular basis and I am sure it happens below that as well.

Mr WALKER: Page 16 of the department's submission identifies that environmental features for water run-off quality were included in the design. How did these features perform during the recent flood event in February this year?

Mr Scales: That is a very good question. What we are trying to do is put settlement ponds and reedbeds where we can. I have to say that the weather event we have just had was probably well over one-in-100. I am not aware of any damage but certainly that part of the Centenary did not go under, so I think it probably performed well. However, in terms of the Darra to Rocklea section, for example, which is further down the road on the Ipswich Motorway, the section that we had done was quite high up but for our colleagues in BCC their tributary stuff feeding it went under. That is why we are always careful when we are building something that we do not build it to a really high spec and the road just looks like an island. In this case I think it probably worked all right, but I would have to go and check any details. Most of our stuff lasts pretty well, but that was an exceptional event. We are still dealing with the repercussive effects of that, but I think it performed well. With regard to the Sumners Road bit, I cannot remember seeing anything on that particular bit of the road, so I think it would have been okay.

Mr WALKER: What fascinates me with this sort of thing—and it is critical as you move forward, and you mentioned it earlier about Cape York—is the ongoing maintenance. It is okay to build something, but I suppose one of your biggest costs is keeping it functioning. That is what fascinates me about this section of road. In 2019 we had the floods in Townsville and you had big events here, Brisbane

so your big cost is the maintaining as well as constructing. That is why I was fascinated about that section of road moving forward, because there are a lot of learnings and I would like to hear more about that in the near future if possible, if you cannot answer it today.

Mr Scales: I can give you one great example, which is Rockhampton and the Yeppen high-level slip lane. We built the Yeppen high-level crossing at about 13.8 metres—I think it might be less—above the river, so when we had the event in 2017, because the catchment is 600 or 700 kilometres upstream so the water comes down when it is blue sky, that section of road just looked like a bridge across a lake. We are working in concert with our colleagues in the Queensland Reconstruction Authority and also the feds and the local authorities—if you get all three levels of government acting together that is pretty good—and trying to build back better if we can.

From 2011 to where we are now, we have had two one-in-100-year events. I am still dealing with the effects of that with the Drift Restaurant, by way of example. I think the network stood up reasonably well, but we do work very closely with the QRA to see if we can build back better. The Yeppen flood plain at Rocky is probably one of the great examples of where we built it back—that is, we raised the whole structure above what we thought was the high-water mark and in 2017 it worked pretty well, but there were no issues at Sumners Road at all.

CHAIR: When we were on the visit we noticed a fair number of security cameras at the interchange, but the ability to monitor traffic flow was also mentioned, as was the lights being adjusted. As you have already said, it is adjusted for the ambulance. I ask you to talk about the security cameras on the cycle path and also how those cameras are used to manage traffic flow.

Mr Scales: We learned a lot from the Commonwealth Games four years ago, so where we can now we put a lot of cameras in and they all go back—because digitally you can put them anywhere now—to a central location which is staffed 24 hours. We can do a lot of that. We have managed motorways. If you take up and down the Bruce Highway and also to a certain extent the M1, as traffic volumes come up we can do a number of things.

One thing we do is something called ramp metering, which you know from previous experience. It seems nonsensical that you only have a two-second delay to put cars on a particular piece of motorway, but it does work. Then we have variable speed control as well, so we can move the speeds depending on the flow of traffic. It is interesting and it is counterintuitive that when you slow these speeds you can get more vehicles through the same piece of road.

On the security cameras and also on the traffic control cameras, we are trying to put as much data into the control rooms as we possibly can. There is a good example on the M1, and we did this for the Commonwealth Games. There is a square plate on a pole all the way down and we are counting these, because if you go into Google Maps there is 15 minutes delay. So you can be in a traffic queue and it will come up that there is a delay. Really, you are in it. We are counting this stuff to give us real-time information on traffic flow, so we use cameras and we are using technology.

We are trying to integrate it all, because the level of traffic is a function of economic activity, so the more economics we have in Queensland the more traffic volumes are going to go up. We now add lanes or build new roads or whatever, but we are also trying to get the best out of what we have. So we have selected vehicle detection for ambos and fires and we have managed motorways where we can do ramp metering, which looks counterintuitive but you can actually get 20 per cent to 30 per cent more capacity at the same piece of road. We are obviously building new roads as well. Sumners Road, coming back to this particular project, does a lot for the locals, it does a lot for businesses and it is futureproofed. If the Centenary Motorway gets upgraded at some point in the future, that bit will not be stranded. So we are trying to cast forward as well, so we are making the best use of what we have.

CHAIR: We did note the lanes underneath as well, so, as you said, there is plenty of expansion there. Once again, sadly we have been beaten by time. Director-General, would you mind if we wrote some questions to you about this project?

Mr Scales: No problem at all.

CHAIR: We would like to thank your team who came out and showed us on the day. It was very informative. We would like to ask some of those questions just to get them on the record, because there was a lot of information, so if we could write to you with some questions on notice we would really appreciate it.

Mr Scales: I think that would be great, Chair, and I can do more work for the question on cost per seal, because it really does depend on a lot of variables.

CHAIR: Thank you. That is much appreciated.

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Mr Scales: If I can explain what we are trying to do and how we are trying to do it, I think it would just help.

CHAIR: Thank you. That concludes this briefing. We really, once again, appreciate your participation. A transcript of these proceedings will be available on the committee's webpage in due course. I declare this public briefing closed.

The committee adjourned at 10.30 am.